Yelena Yemelyanova

REVOLUTION IN WOMEN'S LIFE

Yelena Yemelyanova

REVOLUTION IN WOMEN'S LIFE

Novosti Press Agency Publishing House
Moscow 1985

Social progress is closely linked with the role women play in society. It would be impossible today to discuss the past, present and future of humanity without dwelling on the position of women.

Of course, the attitude to various aspects of their position differs from country to country depending on the level of economic development and the social system. One thing is clear however: women play a far greater role in society and the problems relating to their life can no longer wait for a solution. This is why the United Nations has declared the years 1975-1985 the UN Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace. This decision testifies to the general recognition of the principle of equality of men and women and of the important role women play in society.

Lenin's Principles for Solving the Problem of the Position of Women

The founder of the Soviet state, Vladimir Lenin, used to say that the position of women was the barometer of democracy in any country.

tion and in other spheres of human activity is growing, and so is their political awareness.

It should be noted here that Lenin's provisions about social emancipation of women apply to all countries and therefore have great international significance. This in turn means that the problem of the position of women can be solved only through the practical realization of Lenin's ideas on the achievement of full equality for them.

The Position of Women in Pre-Soviet Russia, and the Beginning of Work Among Women

It is well-nigh impossible to imagine the hardships that women had to endure in pre-Soviet Russia. In old Russia women had no rights either in the family or in society in general. In addition, women-workers suffered from merciless capitalist exploitation. Their working day was extremely long: at heavy industry enterprises, for example, women had to work on average 11 to 12 hours a day; in cottage industry and handicrafts their working day was even longer; the working day for peasant women averaged 11 hours, and in summer time was as long as 16 hours. Female labour was paid for at rates which were 50 per cent lower than those for men. Fines, rudeness and degrading treatment of women by foremen were common practice. There were no labour safety regulations for women to speak of, let alone maternity protection. It was common practice to fire pregnant women. And in order not to lose their daily bread, many working women concealed their condition as best they could, were delivered of their babies right on the shop floor and reported for work the next day.

Women's lack of economic rights was exacerbated by the low living standards of the working people in general. In industrial output Russia lagged about 50 to 100 years behind the advanced capitalist countries. Primitive farm implements used on small holdings reduced agricultural production to a very low-grade market economy and even further down to the subsistence economy.

The Code of Laws of the Russian Empire read: "The wife must obey her husband as the head of family, live with him in love and treat him with the esteem, utmost respect, obedience and humility due to him as the master of the house."

Before the 1917 Revolution women in Russia had no political rights whatsoever. They had no right to vote or be elected either to the bodies of local self-government, or, much less, to the supreme bodies of state power. The tsarist law read: "Women are not eligible for election to the State Duma."

The position of women in the outlying areas of the country with a non-Russian population was particularly difficult. Lenin said that before the Socialist Revolution the women of the East were the most oppressed of the oppressed and the most enslaved of the enslaved. Indeed, they were nothing more than slaves. Women's subordinate position was also evident in the sphere of ownership relations and inheritance rights. The eastern woman was in effect deprived of the right to inherit property. She was also deprived of the most elementary legal rights and was completely divorced from social life. For instance, evidence given in court by two female witnesses carried as much weight as that given by one man.

It is difficult today to imagine that all this is true: the sealed-off half of the courtyard set aside only for women, the marrying-off of girls 10-12 years old, and the bitter lot of the third or fourth

wife of a rich bey. Before the Socialist Revolution, only an average of 40.3 per cent of men could read and write, while the proportion of literate women was a mere 16.6 per cent. As for the women of the East, practically all of them were illiterate.

All these problems confronted the working class and its Party. Their solution had to be sought in the common interests of working men and women both of whom had no rights and both of whom were subjected to merciless exploitation. This is why at the dawn of the revolutionary movement Lenin insisted on engaging working women in revolutionary activity and drawing them into the political struggle.

How was revolutionary agitation conducted among women back in tsarist times?

In the first place, this was done through the distribution of political leaflets and proclamations addressed directly to working women. In 1895, Lenin wrote a message *To the Working Men and Women of the Thornton Factory*. Also at that period, the Bolsheviks issued the leaflets *To the Working Women of the Laferm Factory* and *To All Women Cigarette Vendors of St. Petersburg*. These were, in fact, the first instances of social-democratic literature for women. In a very simple language, and using examples from the lives of women-workers, these leaflets taught them how to tell enemies from friends, showed the road to a better life, and called upon them to unite with the working men. One such leaflet read: "Working women, fight for better life. Take joint action in the struggle for the cause of the working class, because your strength lies in your unity."

In 1901, Nadezhda Krupskaya, Lenin's wife and associate, wrote a brochure *The Working Woman* which was published in the Leninist newspaper

Iskra. In it she wrote that only the victory of the Revolution would free women from exploitation, would bring them freedom and equality, and would make household chores easier for them. However, she said, this victory would be impossible without the active participation of working women themselves.

In the years of political reaction that followed the First Russian Revolution, the Bolshevik Party made the best possible use of all legal means (in addition to underground revolutionary work) for the political education of working women. Among those were trade unions, working men's clubs, cultural and educational organisations, and evening and Sunday schools for adults. But the most effective centres for political agitation and propaganda were clubs. Attached to these clubs were evening schools and libraries. Lectures were organised there and recreational activities in the evenings were popular. Initially, young working women felt drawn to the club because of the chance it offered of entering an evening school. But later on, they saw that there was another side to the club's activities, namely, the illegal work of the Party. Not long afterwards, they took part in this kind of work too. At first, they acted as look-outs at the entrance to the place where a clandestine meeting was being held. Later, they did messenger work, carrying letters and packages. And still later, such women-workers were used to do liaison work with factories and plants. Working women went to visit their arrested comrades, posing as their sisters, wives or brides, passed them money and linen, and brought news about their families and about the Party.

From 1912 onwards, the Bolsheviks started publication in Russia of the Party newspaper *Pravda*. The paper made an extensive contribution to the

celebration of International Women's Day in 1913, which was the first time it was observed in Russia. From January 20 the newspaper ran a special column for working women. *Pravda* carried a list of subjects that it recommended be discussed at public meetings preceding the celebration of International Women's Day. It published letters and items sent in by working women, as well as articles about female labour and the Bolshevik Party's greetings to working women. *Pravda* received so many items written by women-workers that it could not print all of them. At the same time, the new revolutionary upsurge in the country made it necessary to raise the class consciousness of working women and draw more and more of them into the revolutionary struggle. That was when Lenin decided that it was necessary to start a special journal for working women. On March 8, 1914 (International Women's Day) the first issue of the magazine *Rabotnitsa* (Woman-Worker) came out.

Krupskaya suggested that the magazine contain the following sections:

(a) editorial on current politics; (b) the working-class movement and the participation of women-workers in its different sectors; (c) women's working conditions at factories, in workshops, at the counter, and in cottage industry; the conditions of home helps; (d) labour protection for women; (e) chronicle of events of political and working life; (f) foreign section (the struggle of working women abroad); (g) the family and the working woman.

Krupskaya herself wrote an editorial for the first issue of *Rabotnitsa*. In it she pointed to the tasks common for all working women and their links with the proletarian movement in Russia and all other countries. Krupskaya called upon women-workers to

join forces with the entire working class in the fight to change the existing political system. The editorial concluded with the following words: "Our magazine is trying to help working women become more socially aware and help them organise. The magazine has no funds. We started out with a hundred roubles contributed by workers' publishing houses. We call upon all socially and politically aware women-workers to take part in the work of our magazine. Share your experience with socially less advanced women-workers, tell them about your first steps on the road of struggle, about your successes and failures, about your activities in workers' organisations. Write letters and short articles for our magazine. Please inform us about the subjects you like to read about in *Rabotnitsa* and tell us about its shortcomings."

In 1914 only seven issues of this magazine were put out. Out of these seven issues, two whole editions were confiscated by the police. In spite of these setbacks, the publication of *Rabotnitsa* was an important development. The magazine called upon working women to fight against tsarism, against all oppressors and showed them how to carry out their struggle. That was why women-readers loved their magazine, valued it, circulated it at factories, and sent in their last kopecks to keep it going, even at the risk of arrest and imprisonment.

The Victory of the Socialist Revolution in Russia in October 1917 and Changes in the Position of Women

The struggle for the emancipation of women is one of the glorious pages in the history of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. The Party always

included the demand for the legal equality of women among the principal provisions of its programme.

The first programme of the Party was formulated by Lenin and was adopted at its Second Congress in 1903. At that time, Russia stood on the threshold of a democratic revolution. The programme outlined the immediate tasks of the proletariat—the overthrow of autocracy and its replacement with a democratic republic—and stipulated equal political rights for men and women, democratic freedoms, and the eight-hour working day. The programme read: "To avert the physical and moral extinction of the working class and to stimulate its activity in a revolutionary struggle, the Party demands: the prohibition of women's labour in industries harmful to their health; the release of women from work for four weeks before and six weeks after giving birth to a child with all the wages paid; the organisation of creches for babies at all factories and plants which employ women; the release of women from work to breast-feed their babies for at least half an hour every three hours; the appointment of women-inspectors in those industries where female labour is used."

All these demands were part of the struggle for democracy and could have been achieved together with other democratic transformations in society. However, none of the democratic demands of the Party with regard to the position of women had been realized until after the victory of the Socialist Revolution of 1917.

In October 1917, the Great October Socialist Revolution was victorious under the leadership of the Communist Party which established the rule of the working class acting in alliance with the poor peasants. By doing so, the new government acted in

the interests of all working people. It abolished private ownership of the means of production and replaced it with public ownership. It also eliminated all forms of oppression, including the oppression of women. The next task was to start building a new society. It was only in these conditions that the women's question could be solved in practical terms.

So what were the first steps that the new Soviet state took to emancipate women? The most important condition for ensuring legal equality for men and women was to effect fundamental changes in the economic sphere. These had a lasting influence on the economic position of working women.

The workers' and peasants' government adopted a number of decrees aimed at eliminating the unjust social status of woman. In December 1917, the government issued a number of historic decrees with Lenin's signature—On the Dissolution of Marriage, On Civic Marriage, Children and the Introduction of Civil Registration which put an end to the privileged position of the husband and gave the wife equal rights to contract and dissolve marriage, and eliminated inequality in the social status of children born out of wedlock. The decree On the Wages and Salaries of Workers and Office Employees (September 1918) established equal pay for equal work for all men and women. This ruled out any discrimination against women. The decree On the Introduction of the Eight-Hour Working Day (October 1917) established an equal eight-hour working day for all working people. The decree put a ceiling on overtime and night shifts for women.

The Soviet state assumed responsibility for the medical care of mothers and new-born babies. The Soviet government's decree On Insurance in Case of Illness (December 1917) entitled pregnant wom-

en to special leave and pay. The decree On Mother-and-Child Care (January 1918) set out a whole programme for reorganising all maternity and child-care institutions.

On the very first day of the Revolution, the Soviet government proclaimed political equality between all working men and women. This was reflected in the decree On the Formation of the Workers' and Peasants' Government (October 1917), and in the Declaration of the Rights of the Toiling and Exploited People (January 1918). The question of equality for women was further developed in the first Soviet Constitution adopted at the Fifth All-Russia Congress of Soviets on July 10, 1918. The Constitution laid the legal basis for these rights by proclaiming in Article 22 equality for all citizens of the Soviet Republic regardless of sex, race and nationality. It also guaranteed in Article 64 equal rights for men and women to elect and be elected to bodies of power.

Allowing for the specific features of the way of life of the Oriental peoples, the Soviet government adopted, alongside general laws, additional laws aimed at emancipating the women of the Soviet East. For example, on July 14, 1921, the Central Executive Committee of the Soviets of the Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic adopted a decree abolishing the payment of bride-money and raising the eligible age for marriage.

Commenting on these first laws and decrees of the Soviet government with regard to equality of men and women, Lenin said: "Soviet power has implemented democracy to a greater degree than any of the other, most advanced countries because it has not left in its laws any trace of the inequality of women... In the sphere of legislation, however, we have done everything required of us to put women

in a position of equality and we have every right to be proud of it."

This does not mean, however, that full equality for women was established right after the victory of the Revolution. In 1919, Lenin pointed out that although the position of women in Soviet Russia was perfect from the point of view of the most advanced nations at the time, the laws passed in this country were only the first step and did only part of the job. The complete emancipation of women is closely linked with the participation of women themselves in the building of a new society. This called for developing social production and teaching women how to use the laws. Women also had to improve their industrial skills and eliminate illiteracy in their midst. It was also necessary to overcome the established customs and views with regard to women.

Thus, after the Revolution the people of this country embarked upon the building of a new society. Among the many important social problems to be solved was also the one concerning the position of women. The general programme for socialist reconstruction adopted at the Eighth Congress of the Communist Party in 1919 provided for the establishment of full political and legal equality for women and men. The programme also provided for engaging women in social production and the public, political and cultural life of society, setting up a broad network of pre-school child-care establishments, developing community centres, remodelling the entire system of domestic work, and overcoming outdated reactionary views concerning the role played by women in society and in the family.

To solve all these tasks, special departments were set up at Party committees for work among women.

It should be pointed out that in the early years of Soviet power there were great difficulties involved in solving the problem of the position of women in Russia.

The Civil War and military intervention against the young Soviet Republic by fourteen nations weakened its economy. Hundreds of industrial enterprises lay in ruins. There was an acute shortage of fuel and raw materials. The situation in agriculture was extremely serious, and this was at a time when the rural areas accounted (according to the figures for 1920) for 85 per cent of the country's population. It must also be borne in mind that peasant women were less experienced in the class struggle, with weaker revolutionary traditions and a lower cultural standard than women living in cities and towns.

The new society was being built in Soviet Russia amidst an acute class struggle which the exploiter classes had forced upon the people. These classes hoped that they would eventually achieve the restoration of the old regime. They were supported in their aim by the bourgeoisie in other countries. Taking advantage of the insufficient social awareness and political illiteracy of some working women, the counter-revolutionaries sought to win these women over to their side.

The multinational make-up of Russia posed another very serious problem. Some of the peoples had already gone through the capitalist stage of development even before the Revolution, while others were still at the stage of disintegration of primitive society, and still others lived in feudal conditions. The last group included the peoples of Central Asia, Kazakhstan and Transcaucasia. In the mid-1920s, their total population was about 30 million, or 20 per cent of the population of the Soviet Republic.

These areas were poorly industrialised and the working class there was still very small numerically. Most of the working people here were peasants and artisans who were largely illiterate. The feudal-patriarchal way of life, the general social and economic backwardness and the extremely degrading position of women prevented them from realizing the significance of all that was new and progressive in the Socialist Revolution. This is why many of them did not have enough strength to make a clean break with the past. In addition to that, the national bourgeoisie, local bands of counter-revolutionaries, and the reactionary clergy enjoyed the support of the imperialists and put up overt and covert resistance to the newly established government by the people.

The First All-Russia Congress of Women-Workers and Women-Peasants. The Setting-up of Women's Departments

After the victory of the Socialist Revolution, the Party was faced with the task of organising women as a political and economic force. It was necessary to help them overcome their social backwardness and enable them to raise the level of their political activity, to draw them into the job of building a new society and defending it against counter-revolutionaries. The First All-Russia Congress of Women-Workers, called on Lenin's initiative, was to deal with all these crucial problems. The Congress was held in Moscow between November 16 and 21, 1918. That was a difficult time for the Soviet Republic. The Civil War was at its height, the country was encircled by the enemy, transportation was in disarray, and foodstocks were low. The Commu-

nist Party regarded the First All-Russia Congress of Women-Workers as an event of tremendous political significance.

The Congress was preceded by a great deal of exhaustive preparatory work. The Central Committee of the Party set up a special bureau which was responsible for this work. The bureau was made up of twenty-one women-activists. All of them were experienced revolutionaries and leaders of the women's movement. The bureau, which was made up of three commissions—an organisational commission, a literary commission and an economic commission—was to complete its preparatory work and then convene the Congress within a month's time.

At the first meeting of this bureau, on October 14, 1918, its members decided to send political agitators to arrange for the election of delegates to the Congress. These political agitators called meetings of women-workers and peasants. They made speeches and introduced women to the tasks to be carried out at the coming Congress and helped them elect delegates.

Quotas of representation were set: an organisation with up to 200 women was to send one delegate, of up to 800—two delegates, and more than 1,000—three delegates.

The preparation for the Congress and the election of women-delegates stimulated the political awareness and class consciousness of women-workers and peasants.

The enormous amount of attention which the working women in the country gave to the Congress can be illustrated by the fact that, instead of 500 delegates as earlier expected, a total of 1,147 women had come from all over the country: representatives of women-workers at factories and plants, and of

women-peasants. Those among the women who served in the Red Army sent their representatives too.

The delegates to the Congress heard and discussed the reports "The Communist Party and the Working Woman", "The October Revolution and Woman", "The Tasks for Women-Workers in Soviet Russia", "The Family and the Communist State", "The Working Woman and the Front-Line", "The Problems Relating to Social Security", "The Tasks of Socialist Education", "The World Revolution and the Working Woman", "The Church and the State", "Working Woman at Home and in the National Economy", and some other reports. This is what was said in the report "The October Revolution and Woman": "The main task is to succeed in defending the gains of the Revolution. This task can be accomplished by the common efforts of the entire working class. That is why the working woman must become a revolutionary fighter and take part in every aspect of this struggle. The second task confronting women-workers is that of building a new socialist society. And the third task is to strengthen the bonds of internationalism and proletarian solidarity of the working people of all countries."

The report "The Family and the Communist State" called upon the women-delegates to set up a network of public services facilities—canteens, kindergartens and nurseries—which could help women become equal builders of a new society. The report "The Tasks of Socialist Education" gave a great deal of attention to the advantages of the public upbringing and education of children.

Of special political importance at the Congress was Lenin's speech which assumed the form of a major policy-making document. He said that the best way to achieve the complete emancipation of women was

by building a socialist society. Lenin pointed out that "one of the primary tasks of the Soviet Republic is to abolish all restrictions on women's rights". In that speech Lenin called for promoting the self-reliance of working women, for their political education, for engaging them in the building of a new society, for achieving a close unity of the working people in town and country.

The First All-Russia Congress of Women-Workers adopted a number of important decisions. For example, its resolution on the report "The Tasks for Women-Workers in Soviet Russia" read in part: "Women-workers have no tasks concerning women only: their tasks are no different from the general tasks of the proletariat, because the conditions for the emancipation of the working women are the same as the conditions for the emancipation of the proletariat as a whole. The main task for women-workers is to be actively involved in all aspects of the revolutionary struggle both at the front and in the rear." The resolution on the report "Working Woman at Home and in the National Economy" called upon women to work actively for the setting-up of public catering facilities, laundries, workshops, artels for making garments, for washing linen and cleaning flats, etc. The resolution "On the Organisational Question" emphasised the need to set up special bodies attached to Party committees to conduct propaganda and political agitation among women. The text of the resolution read in part: "Their lesser political awareness and the special position they hold in society and in production make it imperative to step up political agitation and propaganda among women." To accomplish this task, the First All-Russia Congress of Women-Workers *proposed that the Central Commitee of the Communist Party set up a special commission for propaganda and political agitation among women, functioning under the aegis of the Central Committee,* to serve as a vehicle for carrying out the resolution.

Similar commissions were to be set up at local Party organisations. Moreover, the Congress pointed out that the main goal of the entire political agitation and propaganda work of the Party among women was to draw working women into practical task of building a socialist society. The First All-Russia Congress of Women-Workers gave a start to the practical emancipation of working women and opened the way for their participation in the struggle for a new life.

After the Congress, the Central Committee of the Party circulated a letter among Party organisations instructing them to set up commissions for propaganda and political agitation among women. The letter read: "All we have to do now is to promote the decisions of the Congress, to create under the aegis of the Party—both on a central and local level—an apparatus (commissions for propaganda and agitation among women) with the help of which our Party could awaken the political awareness of the more backward elements among working women."

The commissions for propaganda and political agitation among women conducted mainly political instruction and general education: they organised women's meetings and rallies, set up circles of political agitators and propagandists, and circulated books and newspapers among women-workers and peasants. Taking into consideration the low level of literacy among women, they organised collective readings of newspapers and magazines, set up schools for working women at factories and plants and drew the more politically aware working women

into practical work at various departments in Soviets, trade unions and cooperative societies.

Because of the changes in the organisational structure of Party committees, these commissions were rather short-lived and were soon transformed into women's committees operating under local Party organisations. The committees were divided into sections, each in charge of a particular task. This is why the commissions for propaganda and political agitation among women were turned into separate departments of Party committees for work among women *(zhenotdels)*.

The Revolution was in its second year when the Central Committee of the Party adopted (in September 1919) a special decision "On Work Among Women-Proletarians". This decision read: "The Central Committee of the Party reaffirmed the importance of, and the need for, work among women-proletarians and makes it binding upon all Party committees to set up departments for work exclusively among women."

Gradually, over a period of six months, the *zhenotdels* were set up at all Party committees, both centrally and locally. Moreover, the Party committee appointed one of its members the head of the *zhenotdel* to be responsible for its organisation. The first *zhenotdel* was set up at the Central Committee of the Party. It was made up of three subdivisions: one for organisation and instruction, one for political agitation and propaganda and one for the press. Then there was also a special board which consisted of the head of the *zhenotdel,* who was a member of the Central Committee of the Party, three subdivision chiefs and a secretary. All questions of a general and principled character were to be decided at a plenary session. Such plenary sessions were attended by senior officials who maintained links

with *zhenotdels,* representatives of *zhenotdels* in big cities and spokesmen for other departments of the Central Committee of the Party.

The organisation and instruction subdivision was to advise local *zhenotdels* on questions of agitation work among women, maintain contact with the leading bodies of trade unions and other organisations on these questions, call meetings and conferences of the staff of *zhenotdels,* draft decisions of the organisational bureau and the Secretariat of the Central Committee with regard to these questions, handle problems relating to personnel, and sum up the experience of the organisational work of the *zhenotdel.*

The agitation and propaganda subdivision drew up directives and wrote special reading aids for conferences of women-delegates (of which more will be said below), women's clubs and circles of political education. It directed preparatory and refresher work among women, sponsored articles on the women's problem in the press, and summed up the experience of propaganda and political agitation among women-workers and peasants.

The press subdivision issued literature for agitation work among women, directed the work of local women's magazines and helped them write articles for the press.

In addition to the three subdivisions of the *zhenotdel* of the Central Committee of the Party, there was a special sector for agitation work among the women of the East.

The *zhenotdel* of the Party Central Committee also carried on extensive work in the international communist women's movement. The leaders of the *zhenotdel* of the Central Committee were at the same time members of the International Women's

Secretariat of the Communist International, which functioned from 1919 to 1943.

The *zhenotdel* of the Party Central Committee and the *zhenotdels* of local Party bodies enjoyed equal status with all other divisions of Party committees. The *zhenotdels* operated in the country from 1919 to 1930 until they had achieved the purpose for which they had been set up.

One specific feature of the *zhenotdels* was the way in which they combined agitation and propaganda work with practical experience of drawing women-workers and peasants into the daily activities of local bodies of power. That was done with the help of public organisations called the conferences of women-delegates. Such conferences were held at *zhenotdels,* at the primary Party organisations of industrial enterprises, in villages and at local Party committees. The women-delegates were elected at meetings of women-workers, peasants and housewives for a period of four months in cities and for a period of six months in the countryside. Women who had been elected once were not to be elected for another term. The size of such conferences was not to exceed 70 persons. The conferences of women-workers were held, as a rule, twice a month, and those of women-peasants, once a month.

Any of the women-delegates could be replaced at the demand of the conference if they did not attend it and if they did not do the job assigned to them.

The conferences functioned in accordance with a programme worked out by the *zhenotdel* of the Party Central Committee. This programme included reports not only on various political subjects but also on the practical activity of local bodies of power, of trade unions and cooperative societies. Such

meetings were usually quite stormy especially when famine, economic dislocation and the plight of children were being discussed.

The social and practical work of the women-delegates was very extensive. The most serious of all was their work as so-called probationers. Back in 1921, the Soviet government adopted a decree whereby probational work was to be introduced as a method of drawing women into the job of building the Soviet state. Under this decree women-delegates were sent to Soviets, trade unions and cooperatives for a few months so that they could see at first hand how these institutions operated. In this way they learned in practice how to run the affairs of the state..

This probational work at, for example, the Soviets began with lectures about the principles of state-building, the structure of the Soviets and the operation of their different departments. In most cases women-probationers were attached to departments at Soviets where the work could be done more readily by women, such as the departments of social security, public education, labour protection, public health service, food supply, and public inspection at factories and plants. These departments assigned instructors for work with the probationers. The probationers also did a course in political science. Here is a list of political lectures and talks they attended: "An Introductory Talk on the History of Mankind", "The Struggle of Women for Their Rights", "The Constitution of the Soviet State", "The Family and the State", and so on.

At the end of the training course at these conferences, women had accumulated enough experience for work at Soviets, trade unions and cooperative societies. Many of them joined the Party or the Young Communist League. Every year, more

and more groups of women did a course of training at the conferences. In this way the Party organised and taught women and drew them into the building of a new life.

Of special significance was the work of the *zhenotdels* among the women of the Soviet East. *Zhenotdels* emerged there somewhat later than in the central regions of Russia. In 1920, *zhenotdels* were set up in Baku and Tashkent, and in 1921 in Tbilisi. At the end of 1920, there were 45 *zhenotdels* in Turkestan, with 25,000 women (including 16,000 Muslim women) involved in their activities.

Work among the women of the East was not easy, but it was very rewarding. The choice of forms and methods of work was made by the *zhenotdels*, depending on local conditions and specific features. As a rule, they began their work with interviews and talks with women.

In outlying areas the work conducted by *zhenotdels* was not only difficult but also dangerous. Counter-revolutionary elements closely followed the activity of women-organisers and sought to frustrate it in every way. These brave and dedicated women were often humiliated, insulted and even killed. For this reason the local Party organisation (as was the case in the Bokhara Republic) had the local people's militia accompany and protect the women-activists.

Political work among women was particularly intensive at the time of the preparation for the First All-Russia Congress of the Women of the East which was to be held in Moscow in June 1921. The Central Committee of the Party circulated a letter in which it stressed that the Congress would be of "the utmost importance from the point of view of political agitation because it would stimulate the self-awareness of Muslim women and

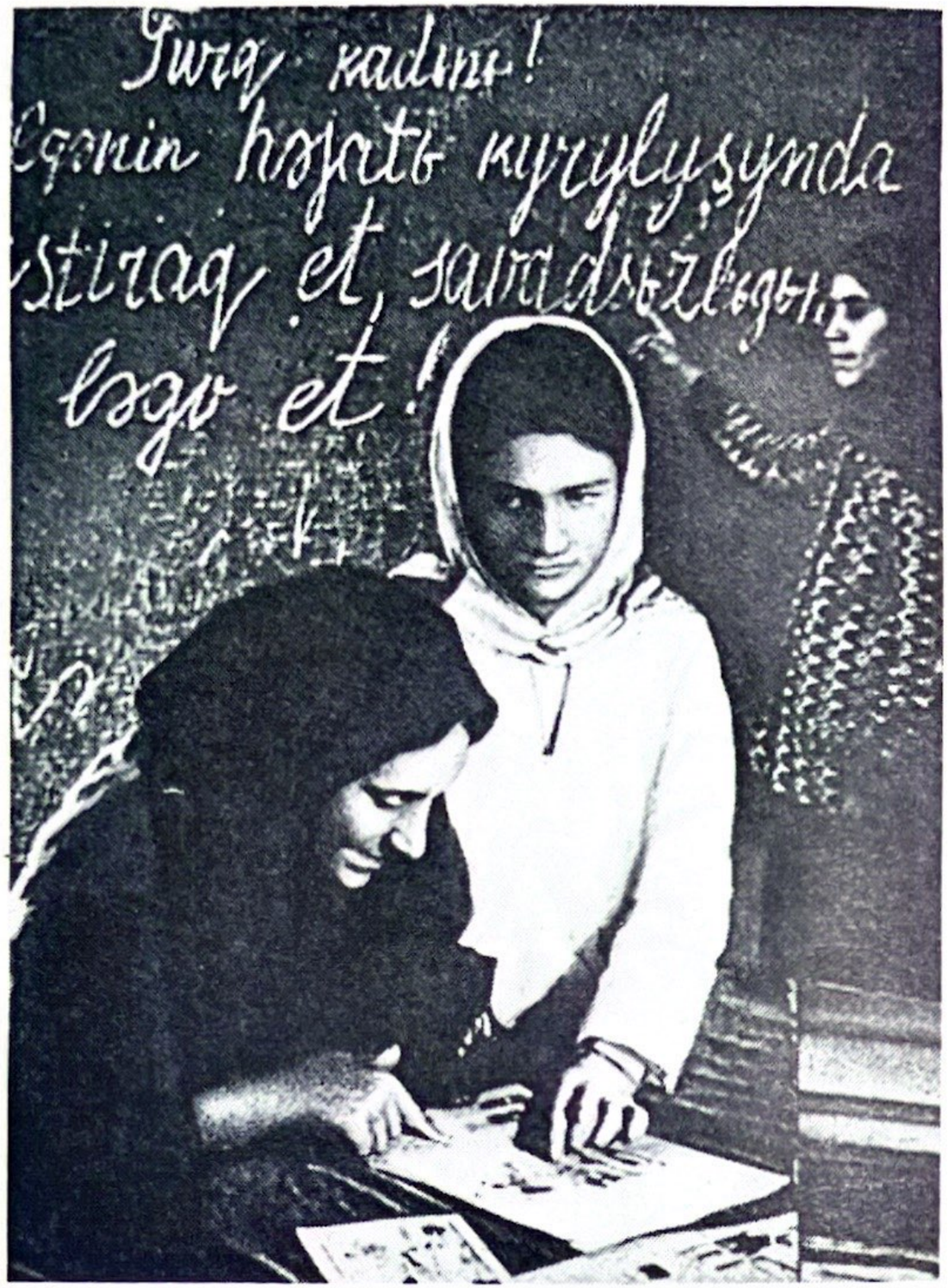
1918-1920. Working women at a munitions plant during the Civil War

1919. Women sewing linen for the soldiers of the Red Army

1920. Petrograd. Women-workers feeding their children during the lunch break

1920s. The home for vagrant children set up at Tsarskoye Selo, the former residence of the Russian tsars

1918. Petrograd. Free lunches for children

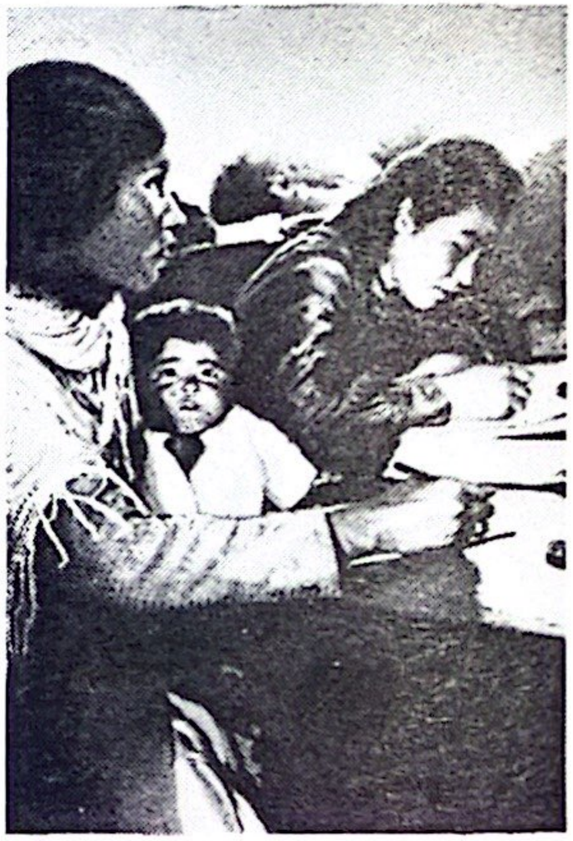


1920. A reading-and-writing centre in Baku

1928-1930. Uzbek women learning how to read

1928. Chuvashia. Reading classes at a Readers' Hut

1930. Women at classes to eliminate illiteracy

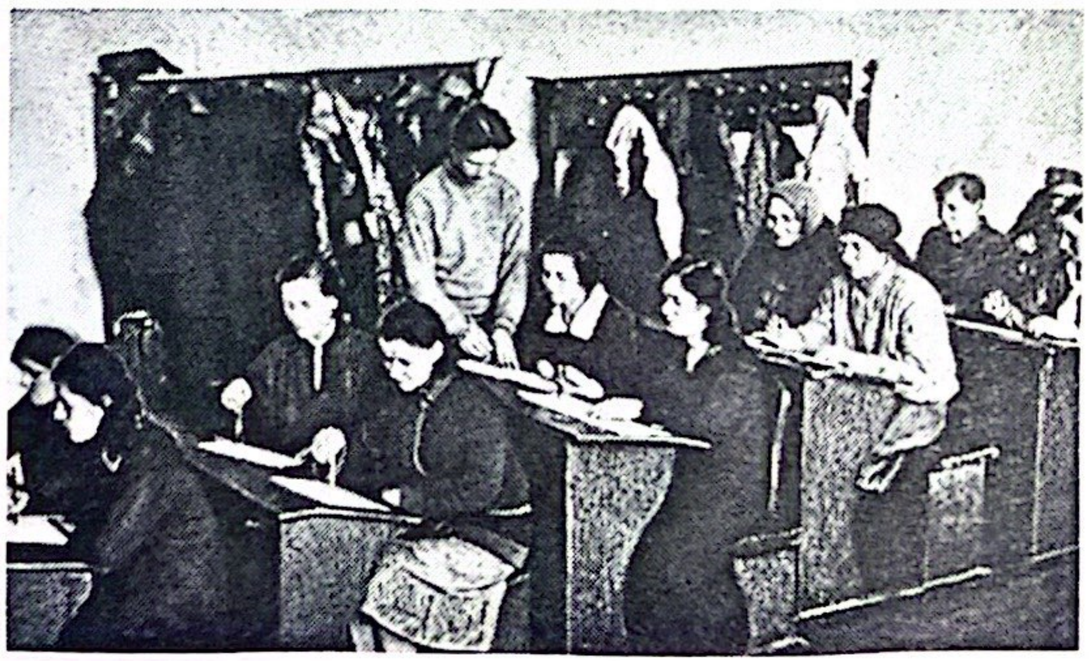


1930. At reading-and-writing school in Tashkent

1929. North Caucasus. Women from mountain villages attending classes at a reading-and-writing group

1932. The Ilyich collective farm in the Voronezh region. A lesson at a reading-and-writing group

1931. Turkmenia. A Young Communist League member giving a lesson at a reading-and-writing group



1932. At a class of industrial drawing in Dnepropetrovsk

1931. The Bryansk region. A woman collective farmer learning how to read

1932. A collective-farm choir in the Ryazan region

1926. Petrograd. Women's celebration march

1927. Rostov-on-Don. A group of girls, members of the Young Communist League, on their way to a *subbotnik*

Mid-1930s. In a theatre box at the Bolshoi theatre in Moscow

1938. At a session of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR

1935. Nadezhda Krupskaya talking to delegates to the Second Congress of Collective Farmers

1930. May Day demonstration in Red Square

1931. Young people on a parade ground in Turkmenia

At the 10th Congress of the Young Communist League

The first woman cosmonaut, Valentina Tereshkova

show the working men and working women of the whole world the truly liberating role of the Russian Revolution for even the most oppressed and socially backward masses of people as are the women of the East."

The preparation for the First All-Russia Congress of the Women of the East assumed wide proportions. Numerous meetings, conferences and congresses at all levels were held to elect delegates. The very idea that a woman could go to a conference or a regional congress was completely new for the women of the East and it radically changed their social awareness. Many women-delegates were leaving their native village or their nomadic camp for the first time ever. Some of them set out on horseback, camels, or donkeys, and others on foot.

The women-delegates came to Moscow in groups and singly—old and young, some of them with little babies in their arms. Significantly, many women were accompanied by their husbands who were issued guest tickets and who literally took a back seat from their wives in the hall where they sat out patiently all the meetings, wondering at what they saw and heard. The women-delegates were received with great honours. The leaders of the Republics came especially to the Congress, interrupting their important affairs of state, and addressed the women-delegates. Some of them read out messages of greeting and others, government reports. During intervals between sessions, they talked with the delegates.

The First Territorial Congress of the Women of Turkestan took place in Tashkent in May 1920. It was addressed by Mikhail Frunze, a member of the Central Committee of the Party and Commander of the Turkestan Front, who spoke about the cur-

rent situation in the country. He called upon the women-delegates to join in the nationwide effort to eliminate economic dislocation and build a new and better life.

The First Congress of the Women of Azerbaijan opened in Baku on February 8, 1921. It was also attended by the leaders of the Party and government of the Azerbaijan Republic. In a note sent to the presiding committee of the Congress, the women-delegates wrote: "We Muslim women hope that the Congress will ban the practice of marrying off girls of 9-12 years of age when they are just beginning to mature."

Delegates to the Congress declared that they regarded Soviet power as their protector and took a pledge to defend the Revolution to the end. The Congress adopted the text of a message to all women of the East and sent a letter to Lenin. The delegates who were elected to the All-Russia Congress of the Women of the East were presented with a velvet red banner to be passed on to the Russian women-workers. The banner had these words embroidered in gold: "Proletarians of all countries, unite! Women-workers of Red Russia, we have taken the road you have shown us. And there is no force in existence that could make us swerve from it!"

Women's meetings, congresses and conferences which were held all over the country—in every region and republic—discussed specifically local questions too. The underlying common feature of all these meetings was a desire to tell the women of the East about their rights, awaken in them feelings of civic responsibility and dignity and call upon them to join in the building of a new life. That was the first frank and open conversation on such a scale between the Communist Party and a

large audience of women from the Soviet East. And, in spite of the fact that the All-Russia Congress of the Women of the East did not take place in Moscow in 1921 because of food shortages (severe crop failure), the tremendous agitation and propaganda work carried out by the Party in preparation for it was highly successful. On their return home, the delegates to the local congresses popularised Lenin's ideas, fought for Soviet rule and for the emancipation of women.

Ignorant of the fact that the congress in Moscow had been postponed, many of the delegates (78 in all)—Uzbek, Tajik, Kirghiz and Turkmen women—met in Tashkent early in June 1921. In order not to disappoint them the *zhenotdel* of the Central Committee of the Party invited them to Moscow as guests. That was the first time a large group of Turkestan women had visited the capital of the Soviet state. There they met their hosts, the working women of Moscow, and took part in the proceedings of the Second International Conference of Women-Communists. The greatest event of all for the women-delegates was their meeting with Lenin. One of them was Salomat Dzhakhongirova who wrote: "We were weeping from happiness and pledged that we would forever be loyal to Lenin's behests."

In September 1920, a Congress of the Peoples of the East was held in Baku. For the first time in history, women took part in a public function of this sort alongside men. The Congress was attended by about two thousand representatives of not only the Soviet republics but also of many foreign countries—Afghanistan, Egypt, India, China, Korea, Persia, Turkey, Japan and others. Fifty-five women delegates attended, three of whom were elected to the presiding committee.

After the Congress, a member of the Central Committee of the All-Russia Communist Party, Yelena Stasova, met and talked with the women-delegates. Stasova gave a brief account of the history of the women's movement in the West, in Russia and in the Soviet East, and told them about the activities of the Baku *zhenotdel*. They also heard the women who had come to the Congress from Kazan, Astrakhan, Daghestan and Turkestan. As a result of this exchange of views, they came to the conclusion that agitation among the women of the East should begin with the organisation of handicrafts artels. This would enable them to be economically independent and make it possible to carry on educational work among them. One of the first things to be done for Muslim women was to set up a cultural centre, which would serve as a revolutionary centre of political education. In this way Party agitation began to be carried out among the women of the East. This form of agitation was soon to be adopted in all republics and regions of the country.

Different Forms of Work Among Women

In the first few years after the Revolution the public activity of women was developed in a variety of ways. These different types of activity could be divided into three large groups according to their nature and the degree of influence they had on women.

The first group of agitation and propaganda methods included public meetings, dissemination of leaflets, as well as excursions, so-called working woman's days, the celebration of the International Women's Day, etc.

At these public meetings different problems of international and domestic life were discussed. At the meetings of peasant women the participants discussed their standards of living, heard about the life of workers in cities and about the activities of local authorities. Many public meetings were devoted to the life of working women themselves. These often took the form of lectures on subjects such as "Women and Soviet Rule", "What Soviet Rule Has Given Working Women", "Women's Role in the Building of a New Life", and so on. Such meetings were very often addressed by prominent state figures, leading Party functionaries and officials from *zhenotdels*.

In those first years after the Revolution, the Communist Party and the Soviet state exercised their influence on the minds of women also through the distribution and circulation of leaflets. Such leaflets were issued on the occasion of the March the Eighth holiday, in connection with the elections to local and central Soviets, the election of women to the conferences of women-delegates, and the holding of mother-and-child protection weeks. The issue of leaflets was also prompted by the changing situation at the frontline of the Civil War.

Another popular form of activity among women in those years was excursions undertaken by women-workers to other cities and factories, to child-care centres and museums. Such excursions broadened the cultural and political horizons of working women, enabled them to exchange their professional experience and their experience as voluntary social workers, and fostered in them feelings of collectivism.

In rural areas a popular form of propaganda was talks with peasant women right in their homes, at village libraries (called Readers' Huts),

in recreation-and-reading rooms (known as Red Corners) and in communes.

Another form of political agitation among peasant women was horse-drawn vans carrying agitation literature, posters and gramophones. In these vans agitators toured villages, organising public meetings, talks, even theatrical performances. They also often helped the families of Red Armymen with farm work.

Working Women's Days were yet another form of work among women. These were held once a month when the entire organisational and political agitation personnel of cities and towns went to factories and plants which employed predominantly women. On the very shop floor (in the intervals between shifts) they held talks with women, gave them lectures and reports in the Red Corners and in the canteens, and organised public meetings. Later, similar "Days" were held for peasant women mostly at local Readers' Huts.

An important form of work the idea of which was to make women more active socially, was the organisation and holding of International Women's Day celebrations on March 8. Every year, at the time of preparation for this holiday, the Central Committee of the Party circulated letters, in which it stressed the significance of the holiday and offered advice on the best way to observe it.

Every holiday was held under certain carefully selected slogans to suit the occasion. When the Civil War was at its height, the slogan of the day was "Strengthen the front and repel the onslaught of the bourgeoisie!" After the war, the slogan was "All working people must pool their efforts to rehabilitate the national economy". There were other slogans too, calling for the struggle against famine, against women's unemployment, for raising cultural

and political standards and improving the skills of women-workers and peasants, and for building child-care centres. The Women's Day celebrations on March 8, 1924, the first of their kind in Bokhara, were preceded by the opening of a women's club, with a large number of women attending the ceremony. At that meeting, twelve women were admitted to the Party.

The second category—organisational and educational forms and methods of work among women—included women's congresses, conferences of non-Party women-workers and women-peasants, meetings of women-delegates, etc. These forms of work also raised the level of social activity among women.

Working women developed the ability to absorb political information, voice their opinions, evaluate events taking place around them, and showed a desire to take part in social activities.

Alongside the conferences of women-delegates an important role was played by women's meetings and congresses. Their task was to examine the attitudes and wishes of women-workers and peasants, to draw them into participating in the running of the state and in economic reconstruction. The meetings were held at different levels, with their delegates representing provinces, districts, cities, regions, small rural areas and individual factories. At their meetings the representatives of provinces, cities and districts raised questions of general political significance: "The International Position and the Situation at Home", "Assistance to the Front", "Soviet Rule and Women", "The Party and Its Work Among Women", "On the Elimination of Illiteracy Among Women".

The factory meetings discussed questions relating to the life of women-workers, the economic perfor-

mance of a certain factory or plant, the raising of labour productivity, labour protection for women, vocational training, the improvement of the women-workers' life at home, the functioning of child-care centres, etc.

Meetings of peasant women discussed problems which concerned them and which reflected the general conditions of life in villages: "The Policy of the Party and the State in the Countryside", "The Peasant Woman and the Food Question", "Efforts to Draw Peasant Women into the Committees for Peasants' Mutual Assistance", "Peasant Women and Cooperative Societies", "The Organisation of Cottage Industries", etc.

To enlighten the women of the nomadic peoples and tribes of Central Asia, Siberia and the Far East, wide use was made of non-Party meetings of women. As a rule, such meetings discussed relevant and important questions and made practical decisions: to eliminate illiteracy, to join a cooperative society, to keep one's home clean. Such meetings were held once a month with a wide-ranging education programme for women. The programme dealt with the advantages of the settled way of life, the social equality of women and men, mother-and-child care, etc.

The significance of the congresses and meetings of women-workers and women-peasants lay not only in the fact that they stimulated the social activity of women and organised them for constructive efforts, but that these congresses and meetings helped them develop their class awareness and turn them into politically conscious builders of the new state, the defenders of revolutionary power.

The principal mass organisational and educational form of work among working women was general meetings of women-workers and women-peasants. For women, they were the most accessible, the simplest and the most comprehensible form of organisation, because they were held, as a rule, at their own factory, in their own collective, among people they knew and in familiar surroundings. The participants in such general meetings showed a common concern for everything they saw and heard and expressed their opinions. Meetings like these taught women how to organise themselves, share their experience with one another and foster feelings of collectivism. At these meetings the women discussed not only political problems, but also questions relating to the everyday life of their factories and work collectives. Such general meetings, with their heated debates on important questions, were held regularly, not less than once a month. There was very often a large number of men who also attended the women's general meetings.

The third group was voluntary work on Saturdays and Sundays (*subbotniks*), different kinds of "Weeks", participation in the nationwide drive against famine, epidemics, etc. Men and women participated together in voluntary work on Saturdays and Sundays. In addition, there were other undertakings, such as "Peasant Weeks", "Labour Protection Weeks", "Child Weeks", and so on. Women sewed garments for the Red Army, washed linen at military hospitals, orphanages and child-care centres. At such *subbotniks* women behaved like real masters of the new society. They felt increasingly responsible for what was going on, they became more and more aware of their links with the collective, of their own responsibility for the Soviet state. This was particularly valuable, not to say unusual, because the only responsibility that women had been taught to have over centuries was for their families.

Working women showed their enthusiasm by participating in all kinds of "Weeks". For example, a "Week" of transport was proclaimed in a district, or in a province, or even in the whole country, and the entire effort of that district or province was poured into the job of restoring transport, building roads, etc. These "Weeks" had two aspects: economical and political (a Week of transport, agriculture, education) and military and political (a "Week of the Front", a "Week of Assistance to Wounded Red Armymen").

More and more women were drawn into participating in the solution of acute social problems, such as the struggle against famine and economic dislocation. Women-workers and women-peasants helped collect, supervise the packaging and distribution of food parcels. Women went from house to house, collecting grain, bacon, wool, and canvas. They adopted children evacuated from famine-stricken areas, and set up child-care centres. Women organised "Weeks of Starving Children", women's *subbotniks,* and set up special detachments to combat child vagrancy.

All these activities enabled women to become active participants in the building of a new life. It is no accident that they were called "methods of political agitation by practical example", because they helped find those women who were talented organisers, draw them into public affairs and fostered in them a sense of discipline and responsibility.

The Party developed special forms of work among the women of the Eastern regions of the country. The old Oriental customs prohibited them to appear in public places. This is why the conferences of women-delegates gained only limited popularity here immediately after the Revolution. The most

effective forms of organisation for Eastern women were women's clubs, houses for women-peasants (*dehkany*) and the Red *Yurtas* (tents made out of felt).

Muslim women very willingly joined in the activities of the clubs specially organised for them. Significantly, their husbands, fathers and brothers allowed them to do so because these clubs were exclusively for women and no men were permitted. Membership was open to working women alone and only on the recommendation of two women-activists. Club work was organised on a voluntary principle, and only the heads of the clubs received salaries.

These clubs usually had several sections: production, political education, juridical, and mother-and-child sections. The production section organised vocational schools and circles, workshops and artels. At these artels women sewed garments, made knitted goods, carpets, shoes, and bound books. They were also taught how to make clothes, knit, and were instructed in the principles of telegraphy, typing and stenography. In this way they earned some money, although the purpose of the clubs was primarily to provide women with working skills which would later enable them to join in socially useful work in industry and farming.

The political education sections of the clubs organised lectures and public meetings devoted to revolutionary events and revolutionary holidays. They also set up Young Pioneer organisations, Young Communist League organisations, schools and circles for political education. In this way the women of the East were taught the ABC of politics, were introduced to the tasks of socialist construction and to the international situation and history of the movement of women-workers.

Under the aegis of these clubs there were schools for combatting illiteracy, as well as schools and courses for training functionaries for cooperative societies and clubs. Courses were also provided for primary school teachers. There were music, drama and literary groups, and also groups for training journalists for local newspapers. Club members issued news bulletins, showed films and organised amateur art activities. Some clubs had amateur theatres, and all clubs had libraries.

The juridical section provided legal advice, organised lectures on the rights of women and ran special groups where women could study law.

The mother-and-child sections set up maternity health centres, nurseries and kindergartens, as well as small clinics, courses for obstetricians and workers in pre-school child-care centres, and provided medical advice on hygiene and sanitation.

In 1925, there were 54 women's clubs. In different towns these clubs enjoyed different opportunities in the choice of personnel and the provision of premises and finances. The first women's club was set up in Tashkent. In a large building selected for a club a school, a library, a health centre for children, a garment-making workshop, an assembly hall, and premises for arts-and-crafts groups were housed. The courtyard was somewhat unusual, with four one-storey houses forming a square. All the windows and doors faced the courtyard. The only entrance to the courtyard from the street was through the gate, which provided access to the premises of this vast complex. On April 24, 1924, the club opened its doors to visitors. But no visitors came. The *zhenotdel* mounted an agitation campaign to explain to local women the idea and purpose of the club. Eventually, three Uzbek women meekly entered the courtyard. They lifted their customary *chachvans* (veils) off their faces only after they had made sure there were no men around. More women came. And soon the club was buzzing like a beehive with activity. Every morning young Uzbek women came with their children for medical advice. The school for combatting illiteracy functioned in two shifts. Many women came to the library where they listened to books and newspapers being read out to them. The flat roof of one of the houses of the complex was taken up by an artel for making blankets. The assembly hall was getting more and more crowded by the day, so that now general meetings of the club members (more than 700 in all) were held in the courtyard. The club also had an elected board. All work at the club was divided among its three sections, each headed by a member of the board. The club had its own conference of women-delegates, a Young Communist League organisation (whose members were girls), and a Young Pioneer group (also made up of young girls).

The clubs trained a large number of women for work in the national economy, at child-care centres and at hospitals. Many women, members of such clubs, were later sent to advance their knowledge at the so-called workers' faculties organised by higher education establishments, also at schools where personnel for local Party organisations and Soviets were trained. Some women-activists at the clubs took up jobs at *zhenotdels*.

The clubs in Soviet Central Asia which enjoyed special popularity were the so-called Houses for *Dehkan* Women set up for peasants who, for some reason, had moved to the city for permanent residence. Each woman who came here from her *aul* (a village) could live at such a house for two weeks. One of the first things she had to do was to

go to the bath house, where she was issued a set of clean clothes and underwear. She could attend lectures and talks and go to the local school for combatting illiteracy and, if she chose, to classes for garment-making. If she came with a child (or children) she could use the nurseries, a playground and medical facilities. The House for *Dehkan* Women also provided talks on hygiene and sanitation. Attached to the house was a model farm plot where women-peasants could improve their knowledge of farming.

One of the varieties of women's clubs were recreation-and-reading rooms (Red Corners) in cities and Readers' Huts for women in the country. All the work here was carried out by volunteers. Members of these clubs set up their conferences of women-delegates, who held their meetings at the recreation-and-reading rooms. The women attended lectures on political and popular sciences. They organised public reading sessions where they could hear synopses of newspapers and political journals. There were schools for combatting illiteracy, theatrical groups and choirs at these clubs.

The so-called Red *Yurtas,* another type of club, were set up for the nomadic population of the Eastern regions of the country. They operated in accordance with a special programme which included reading classes, instruction on basic hygiene and professional advice to livestock-breeders. The staff of the Red *Yurtas* was made up of a political agitator, a woman-teacher and a doctor. The inventory included a film projector, a sewing machine, a milk separator, medicines and other articles. The *zhenotdel* of the Central Committee of the Party recommended: "The work of the Red *Yurta* must concentrate on the problems of sanitation and hygiene, and various economic problems. Political and legal

questions should be regarded as of secondary importance and should be discussed only when they are relevant to the life of the nomadic woman herself."

The Red *Yurtas* organised meetings, and conferences of women-delegates held their sessions here. The activists of the Red *Yurtas* helped publish wall newspapers. All these activities—lectures, talks, work in political groups, the reading aloud of books, magazines and newspapers—served to introduce nomadic women to the achievements of the Soviet state, the life and work of the Party and the Young Communist League. The Red *Yurta* drew the nomadic women into the work of the Soviets and voluntary organisations. Women active in the work of the Red *Yurta* later often joined the ranks of the Party or the Young Communist League.

The women's clubs, the Houses for *Dehkan* Women, the Red Corners and the Red *Yurtas* carried out a great deal of work in the Eastern regions of the country explaining to millions of illiterate and oppressed women the nature of revolutionary change, and turned them into active builders of a new society.

Women Defend Soviet Government

After the victory of the Socialist Revolution, the counter-revolutionaries in the country, with the support of foreign imperialists, waged a Civil War against the young Soviet Republic. That war lasted three years: from 1918 to 1920. Lenin praised the courage, fortitude and heroism of working women in the years of the war. In an address to a conference of working women in Moscow on September 23, 1919, he spoke about the role working women

played in that war: "Women can work under war conditions when it is a question of helping the army or carrying on agitation in the army. Women should take an active part in all this so that the Red Army sees that it is being looked after, that solicitude is being displayed."

Right after the formation of the *zhenotdel* of the Central Committee of the Party particular importance in its work was attached to the search for different ways of drawing women into the job of helping the Red Army. This question was repeatedly raised at sessions of the *zhenotdel* and discussed at many meetings held by women. The special column run by *Pravda* was devoted to the life of working women. In some issues this "working woman's page" was taken up entirely by information about the assistance that working women gave to the Red Army.

Of special importance was the training of medical nurses for the Red Army. They were mostly crash courses, which meant that in a short period of time the future field hospital and practical nurses had to be given instruction not only in medicine but also told about the goals and policy of the Soviet government, the role of different classes and states, and how social changes were taking place in the country. These lectures were built on the principle of class analysis of events and social phenomena. Here are some of the lectures which were read at the Courses for Red Nurses in different cities: "Why Are We Fighting?", "The Emergence and the Significance of Our Fronts", "The Main Features of the Capitalist System, and the Class Struggle", "What Is Soviet Rule and How Is It Organised?", "How to Get the Best out of a Newspaper, a Leaflet, a Pamphlet and a Book".

At one of its meetings the *zhenotdel* of the Central Committee of the Party discussed the problem of military training for women (April 1920). The main report at this meeting was delivered by the Minister of Defence who spoke about the need to introduce universal military training for women. Afterwards, a circular and theses about universal military training for women were sent to all local *zhenotdels*. The circular and theses also dealt with the problem of women's participation in the formation of the militia and the army. The circular read in part: "All girls and women are required to undergo general training and pre-draft instruction. Women must take charge of logistics, for which purposes they must gradually be drawn into the schools of universal military training. Party committees and *zhenotdels* must send more active women to these military training courses." It was evident that only by winning the support of more and more working women, in town and country, for the cause the Red Army was fighting for, the Party could bring about the unity of the front and the rear, which was crucial for victory in the Civil War. These meetings and conferences of women-delegates and women's general meetings helped to draw them into work in support of the Red Army fighting at the front. They joined courses for medical nurses, made underwear and knitted goods, and collected foodstuffs for the fighting men.

Directing the work among different strata of women during the Civil War, the Party organisations gave priority to the job of explaining to them the nature and objectives of the war. The Party laid such emphasis on this work because many illiterate and politically backward women failed to understand these things. The Party used all the available means of oral and printed propaganda and put

the most able of its members onto this job. It issued popular pamphlets, leaflets, posters about the aims of the war, about the importance of the assistance that working women in town and country should render to the front.

Working women in town and countryside and women office employees exercised ingenuity, initiative, resourcefulness and inventiveness in finding ways and means of helping the army. They set up commissions to see what they could do in order to make their work more effective. In the streets, market places and cinemas, girls collected money in a nationwide fund raising campaign, and worked evenings, contributing to the future victory. At their initiative many auxiliary workshops were set up on office premises and at schools where they sewed uniforms for soldiers. The watchword of the day was: "Every extra boot, cap, greatcoat, or pound of bread—made or donated—is an artillery shell fired at the counter-revolution." The Party addressed this message to women: "Onwards, our women comrades! Devote all your strength to the defence of the republic of the working people, to the struggle against the gangs of landowners and generals who bring you slavery and disgrace!"

The history of the Civil War has many examples of the high level of the political awareness and patriotism of working women and their good organisation and heroism. When the counter-revolutionaries threatened to capture cities, conferences of women-delegates announced voluntary mobilisation in order to repel the counter-revolutionary gangs. The women took an active part in suppressing the uprisings of the White Guards. This is what one of the women, participants in the suppression of the White Guard uprising in Yaroslavl in the summer of 1918, wrote: "The uprising taught me a great many

things, particularly the true nature of the bourgeoisie. I saw with my own eyes how the bourgeoisie took revenge on its opponents, also how we should fight them, and what weapons we needed to use against them."

The Civil War was a great misfortune for working women. But their participation in the war and their work to help the army had a great effect on their psychology and hardened their resolve.

That was the beginning of the slow but irreversible process of the social activisation of women, when women began to change their views on life and on their place in it. Many women-activists, who were participants in the Civil War, used their war-time experience in peace-time when they carried on their work with other women, children and young people and helped organise the first communes and state farms, conducted political agitation and propaganda, and worked at Soviets and Party organisations.

Women in Social Production. Mother-and-Child Care

One of the conditions for the social liberation of women is their participation in the economic life of society on an equal footing with men. Society cannot move forward if the female half of its working population does not take part in social production. The deeper and more consistent are the democratic changes in the country, the more effectively this principle can be carried out.

To draw women into social production meant that those who had earlier been engaged in household work, in the trades or in handicrafts were now to take part in large-scale production, where effi-

ciency was higher and more goods were produced. Therein lay the great economic importance of women's participation in social production. At the same time, it played an important social role, because it made women more active in the social and political spheres. Women, who were now joining trade unions and other public organisations, carried out socially useful assignments, and many of them were elected to various bodies of state power.

Women's participation in social production is a basis for establishing their genuine equality with men. Their work at factories and plants makes them equal members of the collective. Their wages make them economically independent, and their work receives social recognition and helps them harmoniously to develop their personality. The Party abided by these principles when it sought to draw women into socially useful production as soon as Soviet rule was established. It was necessary, however, for women to learn new trades and improve their industrial skills.

Women were able to improve their skills through vocational training programmes, individual and group apprenticeship and their promotion to jobs requiring better qualifications. Young women were admitted to vocational schools in accordance with a fixed quota, i.e. a certain number of vacancies were reserved for women. This helped draw women into the national economy and restore the industry ruined by the Civil War. Women worked at factories which produced goods necessary for the economic recovery of peasant homesteads: metal articles, textiles and household goods. This made it possible to increase the commodity turnover between state-run industry and agriculture, and led to a strengthening of the union between the working class

and the peasantry, and the consolidation of the people's power.

It would have been impossible to draw women into social production without creating the conditions which would allow them to hold a job and have a family. From the first days of the Revolution the Soviet state showed great concern for mothers and their children. But the issuing of revolutionary decrees on mother-and-child protection was not enough. It had to be backed up by practical deeds.

In 1919, a so-called scientific and organisational commission was set up at the People's Commissariat for Social Security which was responsible for mother-and-child institutions. This scientific and organisational commission included medical experts who helped organise mother-and-child care centres, define their tasks and establish standards of nutrition. In spite of the tremendous difficulties caused by the Civil War, a total of 1,500 mother-and-child care centres were set up in 1919 and 1920: children's nurseries, mother-and-child homes, medical advice centres, baby-food distribution centres, homes for parentless infants (orphanages) and maternity homes.

Vagrancy among children was a terrible problem in the conditions of economic dislocation, and the Party gave top priority to combatting it through local *zhenotdels*. They found new premises for child-care centres and provided equipment, furniture and food. The women-delegates of the *zhenotdels* occupied the mansions belonging to factory owners who had fled the country after the Revolution and opened nurseries and kindergartens there; they organised *subbotniks*, washed and cleaned, and redecorated the premises, etc.

At first, many mothers did not trust the nurseries with their babies. And in this, too, the women-delegates were the first to help. They took their own children to the nurseries and organised a rota system. Mothers could see for themselves how their children were fed, taken for walks and put to bed, and soon after, they themselves supported the idea of nurseries. There was an acute shortage of personnel—teachers and nurses—for children at such centres. In Moscow special courses were opened for training personnel for mother-and-child care centres. Such courses were attended by 85 persons who had come from different towns and cities of Russia. Similar courses were set up for medical nurses to be employed at child-care institutions. Instruction at such courses was provided by the best medical experts in the country.

Cultural, Social and Political Work Among Women

It was impossible to build a new life, raise children and restore the national economy without eliminating illiteracy, without the political education of women themselves and without raising their general cultural standards. In the early years of Soviet government the women, who constituted half the working population in the country, were almost totally illiterate. In 1921, a total of 756 out of every thousand women could neither read nor write. Lenin called illiteracy the second enemy of the Party and the people. Speaking at the All-Russia Congress of Political Education Departments in October 1921, he said: "So long as there is such a thing as illiteracy in our country it is too much to talk about political education. This is not a political

problem; it is a condition without which it is useless talking about politics. An illiterate person stands outside politics, he must first learn his ABC. Without that there can be no politics; without that there are rumours, gossip, fairy-tales and prejudices, but not politics."

Thus, the cultural revolution in the Soviet Republic began with the elimination of illiteracy. On December 26, 1919, the Soviet government adopted the decree On the Liquidation of Illiteracy Among the Population of the Republic. In order to coordinate this work more effectively, the People's Commissariat for Public Education set up an All-Russia Extraordinary Commission for the Liquidation of Illiteracy in July 1920. Acting under this commission was a body known as a standing conference which was made up of representatives of the *zhenotdel* of the Party Central Committee, representatives of the department for work in rural areas, of the Central Committee of the Young Communist League and the All-Russia Central Council of Trade Unions. Some time later, in November 1920, the Chief Department for Political Education was organised under the aegis of the People's Commissariat for Public Education. This department was headed by Nadezhda Krupskaya, and conducted education work among the adult population of the country.

A large number of reading-and-writing centres sprang up everywhere in the Soviet Republic. At these centres adult men and women were taught to read, write and do sums. There were also a large number of elementary schools with a two-year programme for adults, and schools for illiterate people which were run much on the same lines as primary schools. The highest link in the system of adult education was schools for advanced education.

The work of many schools and reading-and-writing centres was organised in such a way that students graduated either on March 8 or May 1, or on Revolution Day. The *zhenotdels* used these events for attracting more women to these schools. At the graduation ceremonies the women were elected to the presiding committee of the meeting. They also received honorary certificates and bonuses. In their farewell address they talked about their studies and urged illiterate women to sign up for a course at these schools. And many women did. It was taken into consideration that women busy with their children and housework would find it hard to leave their homes and attend classes. This was why those women who studied at school enjoyed the privilege of placing their children into nurseries and kindergartens. In addition, the *zhenotdels* organised instruction for women, especially peasant women, at their homes, instead of schools. This system was called the system of individual-and-group education. The most advanced intellectuals and activists were engaged in the campaign to combat illiteracy: teachers, club workers, employees of cultural centres and libraries, and ordinary activists who could read and write. The Party issued a slogan: "One literate person should teach ten illiterate people".

The Party's work to combat illiteracy among working women was of great political significance. This is what a woman-worker wrote in a magazine article: "In the old days we were crushed, drained of strength and stupefied. We had no education. Now we have an education, we have honours, and we know that we are much needed and appreciated members of society. This is what our Party has done for us. Our Party is the first to have given us knowledge and power. We must live up to its

expectations. This is our Party and we shall stand by it."

Combatting illiteracy among women was the basis of the Party's cultural and educational work, and the schools for the elimination of illiteracy were one of the ways it was carried out. There were other forms of educational work with women, with a special role played by the earlier mentioned clubs in cities and the Readers' Huts in rural areas. Work at these clubs was organised in such a way that women-workers and women-peasants could not only take up various cultural activities in their spare time, but also receive general educational training; the clubs were regarded as an important means of political influence on working women, which was taken into account by the *zhenotdels*. Working through the clubs and village libraries the *zhenotdels*, together with the trade unions, Young Communist League and cooperative societies, drew women into schools for the elimination of illiteracy, groups for political education, literary clubs, "Book Friends" societies and groups for mother-and-child care.

Women had their own publications which played an important role in their political and general education. In the early years of Soviet rule the magazines *Rabotnitsa* (Working Woman), *Rabotnitsa i Krestyanka* (Woman-Worker and Peasant), *Delegatka* (Delegate), and *Krestyanka* (Peasant Woman) were of particular importance in this respect. Central and local newspapers ran special columns for working women in the town and country. These columns reflected various aspects of their economic and family life, the part they played in industrial and agricultural production, and socially useful activities. These columns also carried articles on the upbringing of children, the family, everyday life

at home, etc. As time progressed many women started to contribute to these magazines and newspapers.

An important part in heightening the political awareness of women was played by Party-and-political education at a time when the country was short of food, clothing, fuel and other necessities. Working people received small food rations, while every pair of shoes and every square yard of cloth had to be distributed among those who were most in need. Women also met to discuss whose child needed hospital treatment most. This was why the political awareness of women played such an important role.

Among the mass forms of political education of the working women in the town and country were the schools of political science. These were attended by both men and women who studied the ideas of scientific communism, the policy of the Soviet state, Lenin's works and the Party Programme. There were also political education groups organised specially for women. They studied the fundamentals of the economic policy of the state, of the trade unions, the women's and the youth movements. The *zhenotdels* also encouraged women to study at political schools, Soviet-and-Party schools, and those who did particularly well were sent to higher Party schools and political universities in big cities. Study in groups and political schools heightened the interest of women-workers and women-peasants in political science, made them more active, and gave them a taste for social work.

Those women who had had some political education often became propagandists themselves and joined the Party. The high political awareness of women made it possible to promote them to senior jobs in Party and government.

Working selflessly, women helped to accomplish the arduous tasks facing the young Soviet state. The Party's work among women in the early years of Soviet rule laid a solid foundation for their subsequent mass participation in the building of socialism. Without this initial work to establish equality between working men and women, we would not have been able to achieve the results we see today.

Woman in Advanced Socialist Society

The experience of the Soviet Union and the other countries of socialism show convincingly that in socialist society, where as a result of the elimination of the exploitation of man by man social equality among people has been established, men and women have genuinely equal rights. Under socialism women enjoy a ful, varied and rich life.

An advanced socialist society has all the possibilities for a woman to combine socially useful labour and her responsibilities as mother and wife with active political work.

The Soviet Union has the world's highest level of employment of women in social production. All women in this country are guaranteed the right to work on an equal footing with men. Moreover, women can do any work, except that which is detrimental to their health. At present, 92 per cent of all able-bodied women are employed in the national economy. Women, who constitute 51 per cent of all industrial and office employees, are responsible for a good half of the material and non-material wealth in this country. In this lies the basis for genuine equality of men and women in all spheres of life. Social labour, for its part, with its

relations of social equality and collectivism which is typical of socialist society, makes women more active in their particular professions, more mature and politically aware citizens, stimulates their creative talents and gives them a better understanding of their social duties and responsibilities.

Socialism has drawn millions of working women into the affairs of state, into the solution of problems of great social importance. This was done via the Party and the Soviets, trade unions and other public organisations, via the press and nationwide discussions of laws and decrees. It was made possible by the entire socialist way of life in this country. In the last elections to the Soviet Parliament (March 1984) 492 women were elected deputies. This is more than the number of women MPs in the parliaments of all capitalist countries taken together. In the Soviet trade unions, women constitute 51 per cent of their total membership. Half the membership of the Young Communist League are young women. They also constitute more than 24 per cent of the Party membership.

The present level of social and political activity of Soviet women bears out Lenin's words: "It is said that the best criterion of the cultural level is the legal status of women. This aphorism contains a grain of profound truth. From this standpoint only the dictatorship of the proletariat, only the socialist state could attain, as it has attained, the highest cultural level." One of the principal results of the solution of the question of women's role in society in the USSR is the emergence of a new social type of woman. A citizen with the same political and social rights as men, an active worker and social activist, and at the same time a loving mother and a sensitive educator, this is the make-up of the woman born of the Revolution.